

Ervin Thornton Plantation Home
"Thornhill" WATSONIA, GREENE CO
Between Demopolis and Eutaw, Ala. (Greene Co.)
(Marengo Co.)

ALA
HABS No. 10-238

HABS
ALA
32-WATSO
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
District No. 16

Historic American Buildings Survey
E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer
Ala. Polytechnic Inst., Auburn, Ala.

"Thornhill Plantation"
Watsonia
Greene County
Alabama

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey



"THORNHILL" (Residence)
Watsonia, Greene County, Alabama.

Ownership:

Present Owner: James Innes Thornton.
Previous Owners: Thornton Family.
Present Occupant: James Innes Thornton, grandson and
namesake of the builder.

Date of Erection: 1833.

Architect: Unknown. (DESIGNED BY ALLEN GLOVER)

Builder: Col. James Innes Thornton.

Present Condition: Excellent.

Number of Stories: Two.

Materials of Construction: The materials used were cypress, cedar, walnut and heart of pine. The mansion is of classic architecture, with fluted ^{IONIC} Corinthian pillars, a broad portico, and a small balcony with wrought iron railing above. The spacious rooms open from either side into the large hallway, which extends from front to back. At the end of the hall is the beautiful spiral stairway of mahogany.

Other Existing Records:

See: Historic Homes of Alabama and Their Traditions.
By Alabama Members, National League of American
Pen Women.

Source of Material: James Innes Thornton, Watsonia, Ala.

Compiled by: Katherine Floyd, Auburn, Ala.

Approved: E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer, HAB5
9/15/1936

Additional Data: Thorn hill was built by the first James Innes Thornton in 1833. It is of the Colonial type, standing upon a high hill covered with stately trees, which overlooks a wide stretch of fertile country, including several counties. It is located ten miles from Eutaw and six miles from Boligee, in Greene County. The house was built with great care by slave labor from well seasoned lumber which was cut, sawed, and hewn by hand.

The estate of Thornhill consists of 2600 acres, enclosed with a wall of stone and fence of chestnut and cedar rail. The high stone wall at the foot of the hill was built to protect the acres of deer park. Hunting was a favorite sport at Thornhill, and the sound of the horn has given signal for many a house party to "ride to hounds".

As one ascends the hill to the house there can be seen on the estate Free Hope Church, which was built for the slaves to worship in. The family attended St. Marks Episcopal Church, four miles distant in the country. The school house where the children were educated, stands on the hillside, it was used during the War between the States for a spinning and weaving house in making clothes for the soldiers.

Thornhill is now owned and occupied by James Innes Thornton, (namesake and grandson of the original builder and owner Col. James Innes Thornton).

A minimized copy of the map of Thornhill plantation of 2600 acres as originally laid out, planned and developed by Col. James I. Thornton; this area was acquired by homesteading 160 acres on which the home was located and the balance was pre-empted from the United States and a small area of the tract purchased on the south end from Allen Glover, so as to square the plantation to a parallelogram.

Col. James I. Thornton was born at Fredericksburg, Virginia in 1800, and he and an older brother Harry Innes Thornton, studied law in the office of their Uncle, Judge Harry Innes in Richmond, Va., He and brother rode horse back from Virginia to Alabama and first located for the practice of law in Huntsville, Ala. Col. James I. Thornton was the first Secretary of the State of Alabama, and held this office for thirteen consecutive years; he also practiced law for several years as the partner of Governor Collier; Harry Innes Thornton practiced law at Tuscaloosa bar for several years then located at Eutaw, from there he was appointed associate justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama, where he served for two years and was appointed as the first Federal Land Commissioner for the territory of California by President Franklin Pierce and moved to San Francisco.